

Questions Parents Frequently Ask About District Report Cards

Q. 1 Last year in April, we received a report card similar to this one. How is this report card different ?

A. 1 Apart from providing updated test scores and new teacher data, this year's report card contains considerably more information. Specifically, this year's report card provides AYP determinations for each student subgroup within our school, not merely the school as a whole. It introduces a new measure, the Composite Performance Index, that includes the scores of students with disabilities who participated in the MCAS Alternate Assessment program. It makes use of additional measures--student attendance and graduation rates-- to determine whether or not the school has made adequate yearly progress. And, it draws upon teacher quality data from data files that were collected statewide in December 2003.

Last year the Department of Education was still revising its School Performance Rating System to accommodate to the new federal requirements. This resulted in the reporting of AYP determinations for schools only, and not student subgroups. The Department also did not have the technical systems in place to collect teacher data on a massive scale, and therefore had to rely on indirect measures of teacher quality statewide. This year teacher quality data will come directly from each school and district; and from each district to the state as a whole, using a common format. This new format will make it easier for parents to compare their school's teacher quality data with other schools in their district.

Q. 2 The sections on teacher qualifications draw a distinction between being "certified" and being "highly qualified." What is the significance of this distinction?

A. 2 Being certified to teach, and being "highly qualified" to teach are two different standards used to describe the background and preparation of teachers working in the district. Certification addresses whether or not a teacher has met Massachusetts' requirements to hold a teaching license. "Highly qualified" asks whether or not a teacher possesses a Massachusetts license and has demonstrated subject matter competency in the core subject he/she teaches.

Because Massachusetts has some of the highest standards for teacher licensing in the country, most if not all teachers in our district are certified, and most, if not all, are highly qualified. Those who are not certified are either working on a waiver granted by the Massachusetts Department of Education, or are long-term or permanent substitutes. Those who have not yet demonstrated subject matter competency are now in the process of taking additional coursework to meet the new federal standard. What you will see in the percentages shown in the report card, are indications of how far our district and our school have to go in order to comply with this deadline.

Q. 3 How can I learn whether or not my child's teachers are highly qualified?

A. 3 The statistics on highly qualified teachers provide parents an annual snapshot of each school and its faculty's preparedness to teach effectively in the core subject areas. This information offers a group profile. It is not meant to single out teachers by name or grade-level. Nonetheless, if parents want to know if their child's teacher meets the "highly qualified" standard, they may ask their Superintendent to provide the following information: (1) what degrees the teacher has earned (2) what certifications he/she holds, and (3) whether or not he/she has met the content requirements required for teachers who teach in the core subject areas. All teachers hired after January 8, 2002 must be highly qualified prior to starting work. All teachers who have been working in your school before January 8, 2002, must be highly qualified by June 30, 2006.

Q. 4 What can I do if my child's teacher is not highly qualified?

A. 4 *No Child Left Behind* requires that all teachers who teach in a core subject area be "highly qualified" by June 30, 2006. Until then, your child's teacher may be in the process of becoming highly qualified as defined by the law, even if they have been successfully teaching for years. If this should occur, you may ask what steps your school has taken to ensure that all teachers will be highly qualified by 2006. Each

school must have a plan in place to ensure that its faculty is highly qualified. There may be instances, however, when your school cannot hire highly qualified teachers in certain subjects because of a lack of teachers available. This circumstance will *not* entitle you to request a different teacher or to transfer to another school, but you are urged to work with your school administrator in helping to recruit highly qualified teachers to your school.

Q. 5 What does it mean if my school has been designated as “in need of improvement?”

A. 5 All schools in the United States are required to ensure that all students are “proficient” in reading and mathematics by 2014. To meet this goal, schools are expected to meet certain performance targets in reading and mathematics each year. Performance targets are also set for different subgroups within the school (African-Americans, Hispanics, students with disabilities, non-English speaking students, etc.). Schools in need of improvement are ones that have not made “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) for two or three years in a row in either mathematics or reading. Schools in need of improvement are also those that have not made AYP for any of its subgroups for two years in a row.

Q. 6 Does “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) only depend on a school’s academic performance?

A. 6 No. In addition to meeting academic expectations in reading and mathematics, schools must also meet certain other requirements each year if they are to make AYP. For example, it is not enough that students reach each year’s achievement targets in reading and mathematics. At least **95%** of all students must be tested each year, and if the number of students falls below 95%, then a school can be declared as not making AYP. In this instance, low rates of test participation can result in not making AYP.

Schools can also be designated as not making AYP if their students’ attendance rates are too low, or if they are graduating too few students from high school. Attendance in particular is a vital part of school improvement that is often one of the prime reasons why students either succeed or do poorly in school. With NCLB, however, attendance is as important a factor as the other three.

In summary, AYP is based on four factors: test participation, student attendance, graduation rates, *and* academic performance.

Q. 7 What can I do if my school has been declared “in need of improvement?”

A. 7 Once a school that has not made AYP for two consecutive years, parents have a right to transfer their child to another school in the district that is making adequate yearly progress. The right to choose a new school within the district is a right guaranteed by NCLB. Parents who want to exercise the right of “choice” should contact their school officials to learn what they need to do to transfer their child to a new school.

Schools that have not made adequately yearly progress (AYP) for three years in a row--in addition to offering parents the right to choose a new school--must also offer parents a chance to access “supplemental educational services” for their child. Supplemental services – such as tutoring – are intended to provide students extra help in mastering the basics and catching up. Extra help can be offered after school, on weekends, or during school vacations. Parents seeking these extra services should again contact their school officials to find out what programs are available, and where they must send their students to participate in them.

Q. 8 What does it mean if my school must take “corrective action” to improve student achievement?

A. 8 A school that is in need of “corrective action” is one that has not made AYP for four consecutive years, for any of the reasons discussed above. What defines a school in “corrective action” is that it must take additional measures, beyond “choice” and supplemental services” to break the cycle of failure and make adequate yearly progress. These measures may include changes in a school’s curriculum, scheduling, or student policies. These measures may involve reorganizing the leadership of the school by hiring a

new principal or other key personnel. Parents whose school is designated as in need of corrective action are urged to inquire about what steps the district is taking to improve. A school in “corrective action” must allow parents the right to choose another school or to receive supplemental educational services.

Q. 9 Where can I get more information about Report Cards?

A. 9 Parents seeking more information on Report Cards are urged contact their school’s principal, consult the federal *No Child Left Behind* website at www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/nclbguide/parentsguide.pdf, or view the information on report cards on the Department of Education’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/nclb/reportcard/default.html.